

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 27, 2004

CONTACT: Colleen Kroll (202) 225-5235

ON THIS MEMORIAL DAY

Washington DC - For many, Memorial Day is a time to gather with family and friends and celebrate the beginning of summer. For others, however, it is a time to remember and honor someone they lost during service to our great nation. We must all now, more than ever, be reminded of the true meaning of this holiday. While we gather with loved ones on this Memorial Day, our thoughts and prayers will be with those who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom, with those they left behind, and with those who continue to serve.

The honored dead, who gave everything to preserve the security and liberty of those they loved and those they never knew, have not died in vain. This nation has a long, proud history of service and sacrifice given by those men and women who left their everyday lives to protect and serve our country. Today, we have such men and women deployed around the world.

On this Memorial Day, we have thousands of brave men and women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. As we remember those who have fallen, we also keep these service men and women in our thoughts and prayers. While recent events have shined a light on the disgraceful treatment of some Iraqi prisoners, these actions, carried out by only a handful of individuals, do not represent all American soldiers. Our armed forces include hundreds of thousands of troops that exemplify the spirit, sacrifice and commitment of the American people to securing freedom and democracy throughout the world.

Many of these troops fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan are our own family members, friends and neighbors in North Florida. Last week, I had the opportunity to enter remarks into the official Congressional Record honoring the men and women from North Florida who are selflessly and bravely serving our country overseas, and to honor those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for freedom. Our North Florida units, the 3rd Infantry Battalion of the 124 Infantry Brigade, the 269th Engineer Company, and the 144th Transportation Company are all in our thoughts and prayers on this Memorial Day, and everyday.

While we take time on this Memorial Day to remember those who gave their lives in service, and those who are currently serving, let us not forget our veterans and military retirees. Last week we achieved a great victory for veterans and military families when the House Armed Services Committee agreed to include provisions to end the Survivor Benefit Penalty in the Defense Authorization bill, which passed in the House. The provision adjusts the basic Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) annuity amounts for surviving spouses, age 62 or over, of former military personnel from 35% to 55% over a four year period beginning next year. Over the last several months, we have worked with veterans' and military officers' organizations to press Congress to end the Survivor Benefit Penalty. As an original co-sponsor of the bill to end the penalty, I was very pleased the House voted for this provision last week.

On this Memorial Day, we honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice for freedom; we honor those who continue to serve our great nation; we honor those who dedicated years of their lives

to defend liberty and promote democracy. On this day, and always, they are in our thoughts and prayers, and forever have our thanks.